BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC STATS Infoline

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highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

Consumer Prices

- **British Columbia's inflation rate remained at a record-low level in March.** The consumer price index (CPI) was 0.1% higher than twelve months previously. With only one exception (August 1997, when the inflation rate was 1.1%), the province's inflation rate has remained at or below one percent since June 1996, and during much of this period BC has had the lowest inflation rate in the country. Newfoundland (-0.4%) and PEI (-0.3%) experienced price deflation in March, and residents of BC saw almost no change in the overall price level. In the rest of the country, inflation rates ranged from 0.4% in Alberta to 1.4% in Quebec. The national average was 0.9%. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Declining housing costs–lower mortgage rates and house prices–have helped keep BC's inflation rate low.** In March, the cost of owned accommodation in British Columbia was 4.0% lower than in March 1997 (compared to a decline of only 0.5% nationally). Transportation costs were down 1.5%, but prices for other commodities were higher than a year earlier. Clothing prices increased 3.7% and the cost of household operations and furnishings was up 3.4%. BC consumers also paid more for health and personal care (1.9%), recreation (1.0%), alcohol and tobacco (1.0%), food (0.9%) and rented accommodation (0.7%).
Source: Statistics Canada

- **Among major Canadian centres, prices were unchanged from March 1997 in St John's, Charlottetown and Edmonton.** The CPI edged ahead in Victoria (0.2%) and Vancouver (0.3%), but increased more in other parts of the country. Inflation rates in other major centres ranged from 0.6% in Saint John to 1.5% in both Quebec City and Montreal. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Labour Market

- **The number of British Columbians receiving regular employment insurance (EI) benefits fell 0.8% (seasonally adjusted) in February.** There were 66,690 EI beneficiaries in British Columbia–about half as many as at the beginning of the decade. Nationally, the number of EI beneficiaries fell 2.8% to 548,410 in February. The number of EI beneficiaries declined in five of the country's twelve regions, with the largest decreases occurring in Quebec (-6.6%) and Ontario (-3.0%). Yukon (+4.5%) and Saskatchewan (+3.8%) saw the largest growth in EI recipients. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Immigration

- **British Columbia received 47,545 immigrants in 1997, 6% fewer than in 1996.** Asian countries continued to be the dominant source of immigration to BC, with Taiwan (9,128 persons) replacing Hong Kong (8,631 persons) as the leading source in 1997. Total Canadian landings were 3% lower (216,301 persons) than in the previous year.
Source: BC STATS

Tourism

- **Room revenues in British Columbia fell 10.0% (seasonally adjusted) in December, after posting an 8.0% increase in the previous month**. November's gain was largely due to the effects of the APEC summit meeting held in Vancouver. Similarly, the drop in revenue in December was partly the result of a return to a

Report **Going downhill in BC**

Did you know...?
3,941 Canadians committed suicide in 1996. There were 3 suicides for every death resulting from HIV infection. More than half of the 212,881 deaths in Canada during 1996 were the result of cancer and heart disease.

more normal level of demand for accommodation in the city. *Source: BC STATS*

- **Despite the drop in province-wide revenue, some regions experienced strong growth.** Northeast (+19.1%) led the way, followed by North Coast (+12.0%) and Cariboo (+9.3%). In North Coast, the jump put revenue at its highest level ever ($1.6 million), while Cariboo's gain almost made up for the 11.0% decline experienced in November. *Source: BC STATS*

- **During 1996, Canadians from out-of-province spent $335 million more in BC than BC residents spent travelling in the rest of Canada.** Expenditures by Canadians visiting BC totalled $865 million, while British Columbians travelling in the rest of Canada spent $530 million during 1996. Travel within British Columbia generated an additional $2.1 billion in tourism revenues. Total spending in the province ($2.9 billion) was second only to that in Ontario ($5.2 billion). Canadians spent an estimated $16.4 billion travelling in Canada during 1996. Most ($12.5 billion) of their spending was within their home province.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Travel Survey

The Economy

- **The value of shipments of goods manufactured in British Columbia rose 3.6% (seasonally adjusted) between January and February.** This was the first significant increase since January 1997, when shipments rose 4.8%. The improvement was largely due to a recovery in the forest products sector. Paper and allied shipments were up 15.2%, and wood shipments rose 1.9%. The increase in paper shipments was attributed to paper companies stocking up in anticipation of an April price increase. Shipments of food were 2.0% higher than in January, while beverage shipments increased 0.5%. The electrical and electronic equipment industry continued to outperform most other manufacturers, with shipments rising 10.9% in February.
Source: Statistics Canada

- **Retail sales in British Columbia decreased 4.5% (seasonally adjusted) between January and February.** Sales were down or flat in eight of Canada's 12 regions, and as a result, Canadian retail sales were virtually unchanged (+0.1%) from January. Quebec (+6.9%) and Nova Scotia (+2.9%) were the only regions where sales increased significantly. The strong growth in Quebec was partly due to a return to normal conditions in the wake of January's ice storm, which had resulted in reduced activity at many retail outlets in the province. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Suicides

- **British Columbia has one of the lowest suicide rates (age-standardized) in the country.** In 1996, there were 9.7 suicides for every 100,000 BC residents, down from 11.2 in the previous year. The national average declined from 13.3 to 13.0 during the same period. Newfoundland (6.6), PEI (8.6) and Ontario (9.4) were the only regions where the suicide rate was lower than in BC. In other parts of the country, suicide rates ranged from 10.6 in Manitoba to 19.4 in Quebec. Suicide rates were extremely high in the northern territories (31.1 in Yukon and 32.0 in NWT), but the rates should be interpreted cautiously because of the very small population of the territories. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **While the Canadian suicide rate has remained fairly stable since 1971 (when it was 13.2), BC's suicide rate has been declining steadily.** In the early 1970s, BC had the highest suicide rate (18.6) of any province, but the rate had fallen to 9.7 by 1996. During the same period, Quebec's suicide rate increased from 10.4 to 19.4. Quebec has had the highest suicide rate of any province since 1993. *Source: Statistics Canada*

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Infoline Report:

April 24, 1998

Ski resorts on track - for future growth

Originally published in March 1998 issue of *Major Projects Inventory*. An annual subscription is $75 + GST

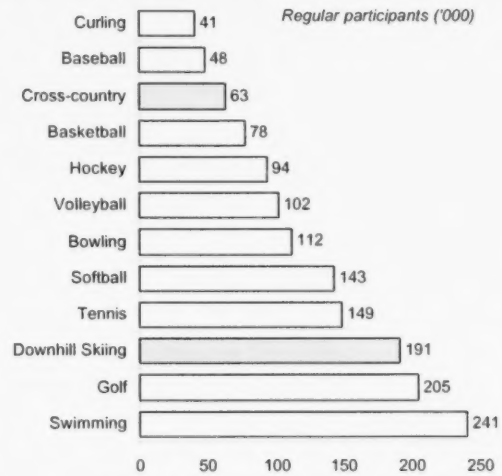
This edition of the Major Projects Inventory reports on 13 projects relating to ski resorts in the province: 5 in Mainland/Southwest, 4 in Thompson/Okanagan, 3 in Kootenay, and 1 on Vancouver Island. The projects range in scope from the replacement of gondolas and chairlifts to the development of new ski resorts.

There are currently 3 proposals for new ski facilities in the province, two of them in the Mainland/Southwest region. The projects are currently being reviewed under the BC Environmental Assessment Act. The proposed Cayoosh Ski Resort near Lillooet is expected to generate 670 jobs in the construction phase, and 3,600 during its operation. In addition, a proposed new ski resort near Squamish on Mount Garibaldi , including 150 ski trails and 20 lifts, is also under consideration. In Kootenay, the Jumbo Glacier Ski Resort near Invermere would generate an estimated 670 construction jobs and ongoing employment for 1,000 people.

Other proposals include expansions and upgrades of the Whitetooth Ski Area, Fernie Alpine Resort and Kimberley Ski Resort. A five-year upgrade to facilities at Whistler/Blackcomb is currently underway and expected to be completed by 1999. Upgrades are also being made at the Mount Washington, Cypress Bowl, Big White, Sun Peaks and Panorama resorts. Most of the projects involve improvements or replacement of chairs and lifts, and expansion of existing accommodations. At the Panorama Ski Resort, improvements include snowmaking, trail development, and 400 acres of new skiing terrain. The Cypress Bowl project also involves the development of 9 kilometres of new cross-country ski trails.

Despite the predictions of some demographers regarding weak prospects for the ski industry given an aging North American population, the future of BC's skiing industry seems bright. According to a 1992 Statistics Canada survey, downhill skiing is the third most popular recreational activity among British Columbians, and the second most popular activity for Canadians. In 1992, 7.4% of BC residents, and 6.3% of Canadians, said they regularly participate in downhill skiing. Cross-country skiing was somewhat less popular, with 2.4% of BC residents participating in this activity, compared to 4.0% of Canadian adults. Skiing, both downhill (8.7%) and cross-country (7.4%), was most popular among Quebecers.

Downhill skiing is the third most popular recreational activity of BC adults



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992

Given the popularity of skiing as a recreational activity, and an increased emphasis on being physically fit, the rapid growth in the ski industry which has occurred during the last two decades might not seem surprising. But BC resorts have seen bigger increases in the number of skiers than resorts in neighbouring jurisdictions–including those in Alberta, where a larger share (7.8%) of the adult population regularly participates in downhill skiing. Twenty years ago, 1.3 million skiers visited ski resorts in British Columbia. In 1996/97, an estimated 4.5 million people skied at resorts in the province. During the same period, the number of skiers at resorts in Alberta increased from 1.1 million to 2.2 million. Ski resorts in neighbouring states did not fare nearly as well. The number of skiers increased 59% to 1.5 million in Oregon and 40% to 1.1 million in Montana.

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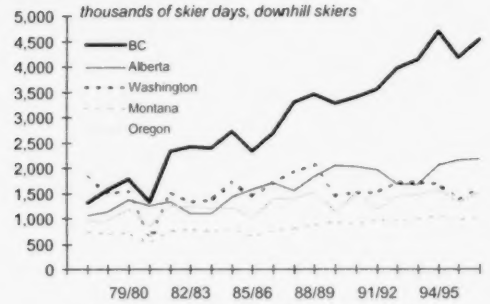
In Washington, there were 1.6 million skier days in 1996/97, 12% less than twenty years ago. As a result of the very strong growth in BC, the province's share of the regional market has risen from 22% to 42%.

The number of skiers at BC resorts has increased more rapidly than in neighbouring jurisdictions



Source: Ministry of Employment and Investment data

The skiing industry has developed considerably during the last two decades. Comfortable gondolas and heated lifts, well-groomed snow, resort villages offering a wide range of services and a winter theme park atmosphere have enhanced the skiing experience for those who take to the slopes. The introduction of wider (parabolic) skis has made the sport more accessible to beginners and older skiers. In addition, a revived interest in cross country skiing, and the introduction of popular new winter sports such as snowboarding have contributed to growth in the number of visits at BC resorts.

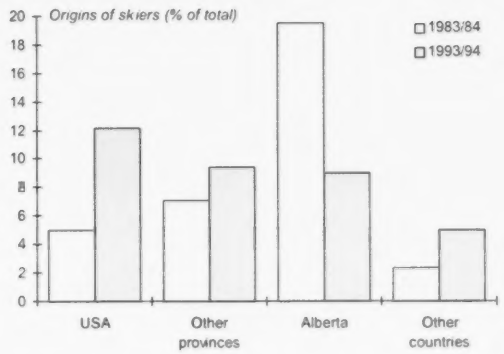
Whistler/Blackcomb has also been a major factor contributing to BC's success in attracting more skiers. This resort has been consistently rated number one in North America, and is drawing a growing number of visitors from overseas. The facility has more than 100 downhill runs, and on-hill accommodation of 16,800 beds.

There are approximately 60 downhill ski areas in the province (1997/98 season). These areas offer more than 1,000 downhill runs and 550 kilometres of cross-country skiing trails. About half of the resorts provide on-hill accommodation, ranging from lodges and chalets to condominiums and luxury hotels. The total number of on-hill rooms available is about 35,000.

Direct sales by BC's ski industry approach just under $300 million a year. Gross lift revenues at the 19 largest ski areas in the province, accounting for 90–95% of total skier visits, are estimated at $191 million for 1996/97, or about $45 per skier day. This compares to gross revenues of $112 million ($34 per skier day) in 1990/91. Mountain ski resorts provide 3,771 jobs (full-time equivalent) for British Columbians.

Lift ticket prices averaged $37 in 1996/97. About 59,000 season passes were sold. Assuming that season pass holders ski an average of 16 times a season, this implies that one in five skiers at BC resorts were season pass holders.

A growing number of skiers in BC are coming from outside the province



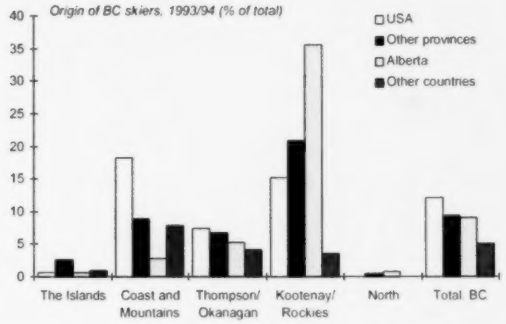
Source: BC Skiers in Profile, 1993–94; Ski Market Study, 1987

About a third of the skiers at BC resorts are from other parts of Canada (especially Alberta), or from other countries. The province is making gains in more distant markets, with skiers from overseas accounting for 5% of the market in 1993/94, compared to just 2% ten years earlier. Most of the skiers from overseas visit resorts in the Coast (Lower Mainland) region, but they also ski in Thompson/Okanagan and the Kootenays. The US market has also expanded, increasing from 5% to 12%, with skiers from Washington accounting for over half (7%) of the total in 1993/94.

The market for ski resorts varies in different parts of the province. In the Coast region, 38% of skiers in 1993/94 were from outside BC. The bulk of non-resident skiers were from the US (18%), but 12% were from other provinces, and 8% from other countries. The Coast, Thompson/ Okanagan (4%) and Kootenay (4%) regions were the only areas with a significant representation of skiers from overseas.

Resorts in the Kootenay/Rockies area are a popular destination for skiers from Alberta. In this region, skiers from Alberta (36%) outnumber British Columbians (25%). Kootenay/ Rockies also attracts a large number of skiers from other provinces (21%) and the US (15%).

Markets for ski resorts vary significantly in different regions



Source: BC Skiers in Profile, 1993–94
Ski Market Study, 1987

Heli-skiing and snowcat operations have made significant advances during the last few years. Between 1990/91 and 1996/97, the number of skier days increased from 60,600 to 85,400. Industry revenues more than doubled, increasing from $31 million to $72 million, and average revenues per skier day rose from $517 in 1990/91 to $845 in 1996/97. The specialty skiing industry employed 506 (full-time equivalent) British Columbians. Most operations are in Kootenay, the Coast Mountains, and the northern parts of the province.

Eight out of ten skiers in this niche market are from the US, Europe and Japan. Thirty-nine percent of skiers are Americans, 33% come from Europe, and 10% from Japan. About 14% of the heli-skiers and cat skiers participating in this sport are Canadians from other provinces.

Does the future look bright for the skiing industry in BC? The evidence certainly seems to support that conclusion. During the last twenty years, the number of skier days at BC resorts has more than tripled and the province's share of the regional market has doubled. The strategies used so successfully to develop and promote the Whistler/Blackcomb resort are now being emulated by other resorts in North America (notably at Mont Tremblant in Quebec). Finally, the development of new resort areas, and planned improvements to existing ones, will enhance the desirability of the province's ski resorts. These, together with the emergence of related winter sports such as snowboarding, suggest that the demand for world class ski facilities in British Columbia is likely to remain strong.

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Need to be *in the know* about major projects in the province?

The article above is taken from the March issue of *Major Projects Inventory*. This quarterly periodical provides important information about major capital projects, underway or proposed, in British Columbia. You should consider subscribing if you work in development, transportation, construction supply, banking/finance, economic development, or public policy. The cost is only $75 for 4 issues ($25 for a single issue).

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Infoline

April 24, 1998

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Jan 1/98	% change on one year ago
BC	3,950.7	1.7
Canada	30,425.3	1.0
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT		% change on
(BC - at market prices - $ millions)	1996	one year ago
Current Dollars	103,631	1.7
Constant (1986) Dollars	74,001	1.0
TRADE ($ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Feb	2,828	-3.9
Merchandise Exports (raw) Jan	1,858	-18.1
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Feb	2,636	-2.6
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		% change on
(all items - 1992=100)	Mar '98	one year ago
BC	109.8	0.1
Canada	108.4	0.9
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change on
(seasonally adjusted)	Mar '98	one year ago
Labour Force - BC	2,044	2.7
Employed - BC	1,841	1.0
Unemployed - BC	203	20.4
		Mar '97
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	9.9	8.5
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	8.5	9.3
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Apr 22/98	Apr 23/97
Prime Business Rate	6.50	4.75
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.30	5.55
- 5 year	6.75	7.65
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Apr 22/98	Apr 23/97
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.4325	1.3940
US $ *(reciprocal of above rate)*	0.6981	0.7174
AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS		% change on
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Jan '98	one year ago
BC	612.78	0.4
Canada	604.17	1.6

SOURCES:
Gross Domestic Product: Statistics Canada, revised by BC STATS
Population, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Earnings: Statistics Canada
Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

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- Major Projects Inventory, March 1998
- Immigration Highlights, for the Year 1997
- Tourism Room Revenue, December 1997
- Exports, January 1998
- Consumer Price Index, March 1998

Next week

- Business Indicators, April 1998
- Current Statistics, April 1998

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